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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL SCUL VE
SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER OFFERS RESIGNATION AFTER
MISSTEPS WITH BRV TELEVISION

REF: A. CARACAS 000679
 1B. CARACAS 000453
 1C. CARACAS 000172

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary. Andres Izarra, BRV Information Minister, offered to resign May 28 following a startling announcement by the ministry that the BRV would begin to impose fees on the retransmission of state-owned Venezolana de Television's (VTV) signal. Izarra claimed responsibility for the ill-conceived initiative, saying he failed to consult with President Chavez. The initiative was retracted on May 29. This move was likely targeted at opposition media outlets whose cameras are often not granted access to government events or officials. It remains unclear if Chavez will accept Izarra's resignation or if the entire imbroglio was aimed at eclipsing coverage of the one-year anniversary of Radio Caracas Television's (RCTV) closure. End Summary.

IZARRA OFFERS RESIGNATION

12. (C) BRV Minister of Information and Communication Andres Izarra offered to resign on May 28. The announcement came one day after a communique from the director of state-owned VTV requiring private Venezuelan media outlets to pay a fee of 120 BsF. per second to retransmit VTV television signals. The fee, equivalent to 432,000 BsF. per hour or more than 200,000 USD per hour, would take effect June 1.

13. (C) The immediate reaction to the proposed measure was uniformly negative. For example, Alberto Federico Ravell, director of opposition-oriented television network Globovision, the twenty-four hour news network and CNN equivalent, stated publicly that his station would not "pay a single Bolivar" for VTV's signal. The day after the VTV measure was announced, Izarra offered his resignation to Chavez in a brief public statement at Miraflores Presidential Palace. Izarra, generally viewed as one of Chavez' more competent administrators, claimed the decision to charge for the right to rebroadcast VTV's signal was his initiative, made without consulting Chavez or any other member of the Executive. VTV's director officially retracted the measure on May 29, citing instructions from the Ministry of Communications. It remains unclear if Chavez will accept Izarra's offer to resign.

14. (C) The VTV measure, though directed at all private media outlets, was widely believed to be aimed at Globovision's "You Saw it Here" (Usted lo Vio) segments which

rebroadcast the more outlandish statements by BRV officials. These spots typically include VTV footage, as Globovision and other private media outlets have long been banned from covering official events.

Comment

¶5. (C) The ill-conceived VTV measure, if implemented, would likely have curtailed any coverage of BRV officials by Venezuela's most widely watched television channels. There is some media speculation that Izarra may have been out in front of the rest of the government - more Chavista than Chavez - and he may have been quickly reprimanded for acting independently. Embassy PAS contacts have commented that the VTV measure and subsequent Izarra resignation have diverted attention away from the one year anniversary of RCTV's closure.

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